SELF-TRANSCENDENCE VALUES AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY: DRIVEN BY THE CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF STRANGERS OR FOR THOSE WE ARE ACQUAINTED WITH?

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Self-transcendent values have recently been introduced in research in Sense of Community (SoC) to address the issue of inclusive and exclusive forms of SoC. The present paper, reporting the findings of a cross-sectional study involving 469 adult Italian participants,expands the results of a previous study by (a) replicating a model in which community universalism (i.e., an operational application of universalistic rules in local communities) is associated to SoC both directly and indirectly, through the mediation of the perceived reliability of community facilities, and (b) adding the basic self-transcendent values of benevolence and universalism to the model so as to test their associations with community universalism and SoC. The results confirmed the original model and showed different patterns of relationship linking benevolence (directly) and universalism (indirectly) to SoC. The differences are explained based on the concrete vs. abstract level of the two values and the different social categorization level implied.

Keywords: *Sense of Community; Self-transcendence values; Universalism; Benevolence; Community-diversity debate*

1. Introduction

Sense of Community (SoC) is a specific orientation that people develop towards the communities they feel they belong to, in which they feel connected with others, confident to meet their needs and also able to exert influence (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In its very essence SoC has a social focus, since it reveals whether and to what extent we believe a community is suited to ourselves. Besides the many benefits deriving from SoC, especially for well-being and quality of life (Powell, 2015) and sense of agency and civic participation (Talò et al., 2014), drawbacks have also been highlighted, mainly closure and rejection of diversity (Neal & Neal, 2014). Indeed, following social identity and social categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), there would be reason to expect that the higher the SoC, the more likely the rejection of diversity and the rise of prejudice. However, the debate is still open as to whether and which contextual and cultural factors can moderate this relationship and turn it from vicious to virtuous. There is also leeway to enhance the knowledge of the possible conditions that allow both community cohesion and openness to be preserved (Stivala et al., 2016).

The role of cultural orientations and basic human values has recently been introduced to uncover the complex relationship between the sense of we-ness underlying SoC and its capacity for including or excluding others (Mannarini &Salvatore, 2019; Mannarini et al., 2020a). Values

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induce people to take a stance towards social issues, affect how they relate to others, and support or oppose shared systems of belief, political and religious ideologies. They can either promote or hinder the conditions for the development of a common basis and shared experiences among diverse groups.

Among Schwartz's (1992) 10 basic human values, of special interest for the community-diversity debate are self-transcendence values, that is, benevolence and universalism. As other-focused values, both have been found to be associated to positive and welcoming attitudes towards others (Ardenghi, 2021; Bayram, 2016; Parks-Leduc et al., 2015), and also to egalitarian orientations (Schwartz, 1994). There is preliminary evidence that, taken as a general category, self-transcendence values are positively associated to SoC (Mannarini et al., 2020a), however there is the need to unpack this value category so as to examine whether concern for the welfare of strangers (i.e., universalism) and concern for the welfare of family, friends and acquaintances (i.e., benevolence) are both consistently related to SoC. Different or even opposing patterns of relationship should not be ruled out in principle, as also suggested by a recent study on the support for universal basic income (UBI) (Choi, 2021). According to that study, individual universalism was found to be positively and significantly associated with support for UBI, while benevolence was found to have a negative relationship with it.

As for the present study, we argue that while a positive association of SoC with universalism would expand the boundaries of "we", its association with benevolence would restrict them, thus shaping a respectively inclusive and exclusive form of SoC.

2. Rationale and hypotheses

The present paper expands the results of a previous study (Mannarini et al., 2020b) on the cultural and contextual determinants of SoC by (a) replicating a model in which the distal variable of community universalism (i.e., an operational application of universalistic rules in local communities) is associated to SoC both directly and indirectly, through the mediation of a proximal variable, that is, the perceived reliability of community facilities, and (b) adding the two basic self-transcendence values so as to test their associations with community universalism and SoC.

Consistently with the previous study, we formulated the following hypotheses, expecting that:

H_1. Community universalism would be positively associated to SoC. We coined the notion of community universalism (Mannarini et al., 2020b) integrating two perspectives: Schwartz's (1992) notion of universalism as the concern for the welfare of others, and the sociological notion of universalism as the endorsement of rules that apply across relationships and admit no exception (Ma & McLean Parks, 2007). Furthermore, we developed a measure aimed at assessing support for universalistic rules in local communities, namely: nondiscrimination, equal accessibility to facilities, and fair treatment. We expected that support for these three rules would positively resonate with SoC.

H_2. The perceived reliability of community facilities would also be positively associated with SoC. In line with research on the community determinants of SoC (i.e., the physical, social, and functional features of the community environment, see Mannarini et al., 2020b for a review), we expected that the perception of a specific community characteristic such as the reliability of community facilities would be positively connected to SoC, and more strongly than community universalism.

H_3. Besides being directly related to SoC, the perceived reliability of community facilities would also mediate the relationship between community universalism and SoC. This hypothesis was based on the fact that community universalism and reliability of community facilities were set as a distal

and proximal variable, respectively. We expected that the distal factor would connect to SoC through the mediation of the proximal factor.

This mediational model was integrated with the addition of two more variables (i.e., the two self-transcendent values of universalism and benevolence, as conceptualized in Schwartz's theory), which were entered as predictors of community universalism. Specifically, we expected that:

H4. Universalism would be positively associated to SoC, based on the same rationale underlying H1, but it would also be indirectly connected to SoC via the mediation of community universalism, the latter being an application of universalistic rules in the community setting.

H5. Benevolence would be positively associated to SoC, but also indirectly via the mediation of community universalism. Due to the lack of studies testing the relationship between benevolence and SoC, our default hypothesis was that the two self-transcendent values, which are both other-focused values, would show the same pattern of associations. However, since benevolence refers to the concern for those who we know, and not necessarily for those we do not know (as in universalism), we could not rule out in principle that benevolence would be less significantly connected, or unconnected, to support for universalistic rules applied in local communities.

3. Method

A convenience sample of 469 (51.9% female) adult residents of Southern Italy, between 18 and 81 years of age (mean [M] = 38, standard deviation [SD] = 14.4), with different education levels (12.6% primary education; 40% secondary education; 47,5% tertiary education) was recruited by means of a snowball design, according to a quota sampling by gender and age. In terms of sample size, considering a statistical power of 80%, a significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, a minimum of 212 participants would be needed in order to observe an R^2 of at least .1 in the endogenous variable (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). This requirement was largely met in the present study.

Participants were invited to participate in a study concerning their community and asked to answer an online self-report questionnaire, a task that took about 15 min and that was voluntarily undertaken without providing incentives. Following APA's ethical guidelines, participants were informed about the subject and the aim of the study, the procedures, as well as about their right to refuse or to withdraw at any time.

3.1. Measures

An online questionnaire was drawn up, consisting of a section including background information (age, gender, education, and community of residence) and the following measures.

Psychological Sense of Community (α =.85)

The 8-item Brief Sense of Community scale by Peterson, Speer, and McMillan (2008) was used, with five response modalities (from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Participants were asked to refer to the place where they lived, intended as a community of people residing in the same territory.

Perceived reliability of community facilities (α = .74)

Participants were asked to rate the reliability of local public and semi-public services, namely public transport, healthcare services, police, schools, public agencies, and local businesses. Response modalities ranged from 1 = not at all to 4 = very much.

Community universalism (α = .88)

A 6-item scale aimed at contextualizing universalism in local communities was used (Author et al., 2020b), based on three dimensions: (a) Nondiscrimination (example item: "In this community, as everywhere, citizens' rights must apply to all, irrespectively of race, nationality or income");(b) Services accessibility (example item: "Community services are a right to which all are entitled, not a favor done to one person"); and (c) Fair treatment (example item: "In this community all must be treated alike by institutions"). Response modalities ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Self-transcendence values

Items measuring Universalism (α = .67) and Benevolence (α = .75) were drawn from the validated Italian version of the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ) (Di Nuovo et al., 2011). PVQ includes short verbal portraits of people, each describing a person's goals that underpin a single value type. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the person described is similar to themselves using a 6-point scale (1 = very much like me, 6 = not like me at all. For the benefit of clarity, scores were reversed before the variables were entered in the analyses).

4. Results

Table 1 reports the reliability statistics and correlations of the scales used in the analyses. The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio confirmed the discriminant validity.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation and correlations of variables of the study

	ρ	CR	AVE	R^2	1	2	3	4
1. Universalism	0.788	0.809	0.591		1			
2. Benevolence	0.8	0.886	0.796		0.532***	1		
3. Community Universalism	0.882	0.909	0.626	0.07	0.264***	0.128*	1	
4. Facilities Reliability	0.755	0.825	0.442	0.034	-0.031	-0.022	0.168**	1
5. SoC	0.896	0.891	0.53	0.211	0.036	0.106*	0.206***	0.426***

Reliability statistics, R^2 estimated *β* coefficients resulting from the bootstrap procedure reported.
*p< 0.05, **p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

The research hypotheses were tested via a variance-based estimator, Partial Least Square Modeling (PLS-PM) for testing mediation path model. The estimated LVs Community Universalism, Universalism and Benevolence are exogenous variables, with Community Universalism specified in a reflective way according to Mannarini and colleagues (2020b), and measured by its 1st order LVs (Nondiscrimination, Services accessibility, and Fair treatment). Facilities Reliability, which is measured by its indicators, represents the mediators. SoC represents the endogenous LV, measured by its indicators. Structural model evaluation and mediation analysis were carried out through a non-parametric procedure using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples. Age, gender, and education were entered as control variables.

As a test of common method bias, we used Harman's single factor test. The unrotated exploratory factor analysis with all the items loading on one single factor explained 10.3% of variance, far below the standard 50% cut-off. Moreover, we performed a full collinearity test and

obtained VIFs (variance inflation factors) lower than 3.3, the threshold set for pathological collinearity.

The results (Table 2) confirmed the mediated effect of Community Universalism on SoC via Facilities Reliability, as in Mannarini and colleagues (2020b). They also showed the existence of an indirect mediation of Universalism on SoC via Community Universalism, and a direct association of Benevolence with SoC, with no mediation effect via Community Universalism. Neither gender, age nor education had significant effects.

Table 2. Structural Model Evaluation

Direct effects	β coefficients	T Statistics	P Values
Benevolence→ Community Universalism	0.012	0.219	0.826
Benevolence→SoC	0.134**	2.849	0.004
Community Universalism→Facilities Reliability	0.160*	2.517	0.012
Community Universalism→SoC	0.143***	3.542	0.000
Facilities Reliability→ SoC	0.400***	9.939	0.000
Universalism→ Community Universalism	0.265***	4.079	0.000
Universalism→SoC	-0.055	1.035	0.301
Indirect effects	**β coefficients**	**T Statistics**	**P Values**
Universalism→ Community Universalism→SoC	0.038**	2.970	0.003
Community Universalism →Facilities Reliability → SoC	0.064*	2.384	0.017
Benevolence→ Community Universalism→SoC	0.002	0.215	0.830

Estimated β coefficients resulting from the bootstrap procedure are reported.
$^*p < 0.05, ^{**}p < 0.01, ^{***}p < 0.001$

5. Discussion

The results confirmed what was found in the original study (H_1, H_2 and H_3), showing that support for universalistic rules regulating community life is positively associated to SoC, both directly and indirectly, and that the perception of a single contextual aspect of the community, such as the perceived reliability of community facilities, is likely to explain SoC more than value orientation. This finding is consistent with previous research on residential satisfaction (Jorgensen et al., 2010) and SoC community determinants (Mannarini et al., 2018), and confirms the role that the perception and the experience of specific characteristics of the community play in SoC.

As for the additional hypotheses, H_4 and H_5 were only partially confirmed. The study showed that the concern for the welfare of strangers and the concern for the welfare of family, friends and acquaintances are linked to SoC differently. While benevolence has a direct association with it, universalism is connected to SoC only through the operational application of universalistic rules in a specific community. Indeed, while benevolence implies a concrete relational reference, since it applies to people we know, universalism has an abstract reference, that is hypothetical "persons". They also imply different levels of social categorization, with universalism activating the super-ordered ingroup of human beings and benevolence the ingroup composed of those with whom we have a personal relationship. Our findings indicate that the concrete relational universe evoked by benevolence resonates with the feelings and cognitions that people develop about their local community, thereby suggesting that SoC is linked to the concern for those we are familiar with and conceive of as our mates. However, universalism, too, proved to be associated to SoC, yet only if deprived of its abstraction. Indeed, when universalistic principles are actualized in a specific community, that is, when the super-ordered ingroup of human beings conflates into the sub-ordered ingroup of real communities, then it shows its association to SoC, suggesting that SoC can

also be linked to the concern for strangers. Moreover, since in this study community universalism was operationalized as support for universalistic rules, this finding suggests that values may shape norm perceptions within communities.

These preliminary results certainly need to be refined and confirmed in future research, given the limitations entailed in the cross-sectional design of the study, the convenience nature of the sample, and the awareness that a range of contextual factors can moderate the relationship between self-transcendence values and SoC. Among these contextual factors, some physical, social and cultural characteristics of the community may intervene, such as the occurrence of physical and social incivilities, ethno-cultural heterogeneity (Mannarini et al., 2017), the amount of contact between diverse groups, and the amount of social capital in the community, as well as the specificity of local cultural orientations.

Practical implications of the study may concern the promotion of community settings– in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods – that support and work according to self-transcendent values, especially to universalism, which extends the concern for the welfare of others to all human beings inside and outside the community. Indeed, as long as universalistic values broaden our moral universe (Schwartz, 2007), they also make us more willing to accept diversity.

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